



UPDATE

US 321 Improvements Environmental Impact Statement
Watauga and Caldwell Counties, North Carolina
North Carolina Department of Transportation
TIP No. R-2237C

No.1 Summer '95

This newsletter is the first in a series published by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) to keep the public informed about the US 321 Environmental Impact Statement Study.

Bulletin Board

Citizens Informational Workshop

Date: August 29, 1995
Time: 5:00pm to 8:00pm
Place: Blowing Rock School
Cafeteria on
Sunset Drive

Information Line *1-800-263-2434*

John Page and Nicole Heckstall can answer your questions from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm.

Our receptionist can add you to the newsletter mailing list.

(Leave a message)

US 321 EIS STUDY INITIATED

Public Invited to Citizens Informational Workshop

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) has initiated studies that will lead to the preparation of a Federal Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for improvements to US 321 from SR 1500 (Blackberry Road) north to US 221 in Blowing Rock. Both a widening alternative and a bypass alternative are being considered.

The NCDOT will host a Citizens Informational Workshop on August 29th at the Cafeteria of Blowing Rock School in Blowing Rock. The purpose of the meeting is to introduce the EIS study to the public. Representatives of the study team will be available from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. to answer questions and obtain citizens' input on the project. Come at your convenience and meet individually with study team members in an informal setting.

Three-Phased Study Planned

The US 321 EIS Study is being performed in three phases: 1) selection of reasonable Blowing Rock bypass alternatives, 2) preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for public and agency review that compares the widening and bypass alternatives, and 3) preparation of a Final EIS that responds to public and agency comment and identifies a preferred alternative.

The study area for Phase I is shown on the next page of this newsletter. The selection of potential bypass alternatives for evaluation in Phase I will be based on:



comments by the public, terrain and other engineering factors, and the avoidance of sensitive social, cultural and natural features. These potential bypass alternatives will then be evaluated and compared using construction and right-of-way cost, the extent of excavation waste and other engineering factors, and the alternatives' effect on sensitive features.

Phase I is expected to be complete in the Fall of 1996.

The firm of Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas, Inc. is conducting the study under the direction of the NCDOT and the Federal Highway Administration. A Citizens Advisory Committee that includes representatives from 12 community organizations is also participating in the study.

EIS WORK PROGRAM

How does this study relate to the Environmental Assessment released in 1993?

In August 1993, a Federal Environmental Assessment proposed that US 321 be improved to four lanes from NC 268 at Patterson to US 221 in Blowing Rock. It listed a widening project as the preferred alternative and concluded that a bypass around Blowing Rock was not reasonable. Following a public hearing, a Federal Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was released in September 1994 for the widening project between NC 268 and SR 1500 (Blackberry Road). Based on hearing and agency comments, the FONSI stated that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) would be prepared for US 321 improvements from SR 1500 to US 221 in Blowing Rock and would include consideration of a Blowing Rock bypass.

At the public hearings, most speakers spoke in favor of a four lane US 321 between Lenoir and Boone. However, many citizens from Blowing Rock strongly preferred a project that included a bypass around Blowing Rock.

The 1996-2002 NCDOT Transportation Improvement Program calls for right-of-way acquisition for the southern 4.7 miles of the original project (between NC 268 and SR 1370) to begin in Federal

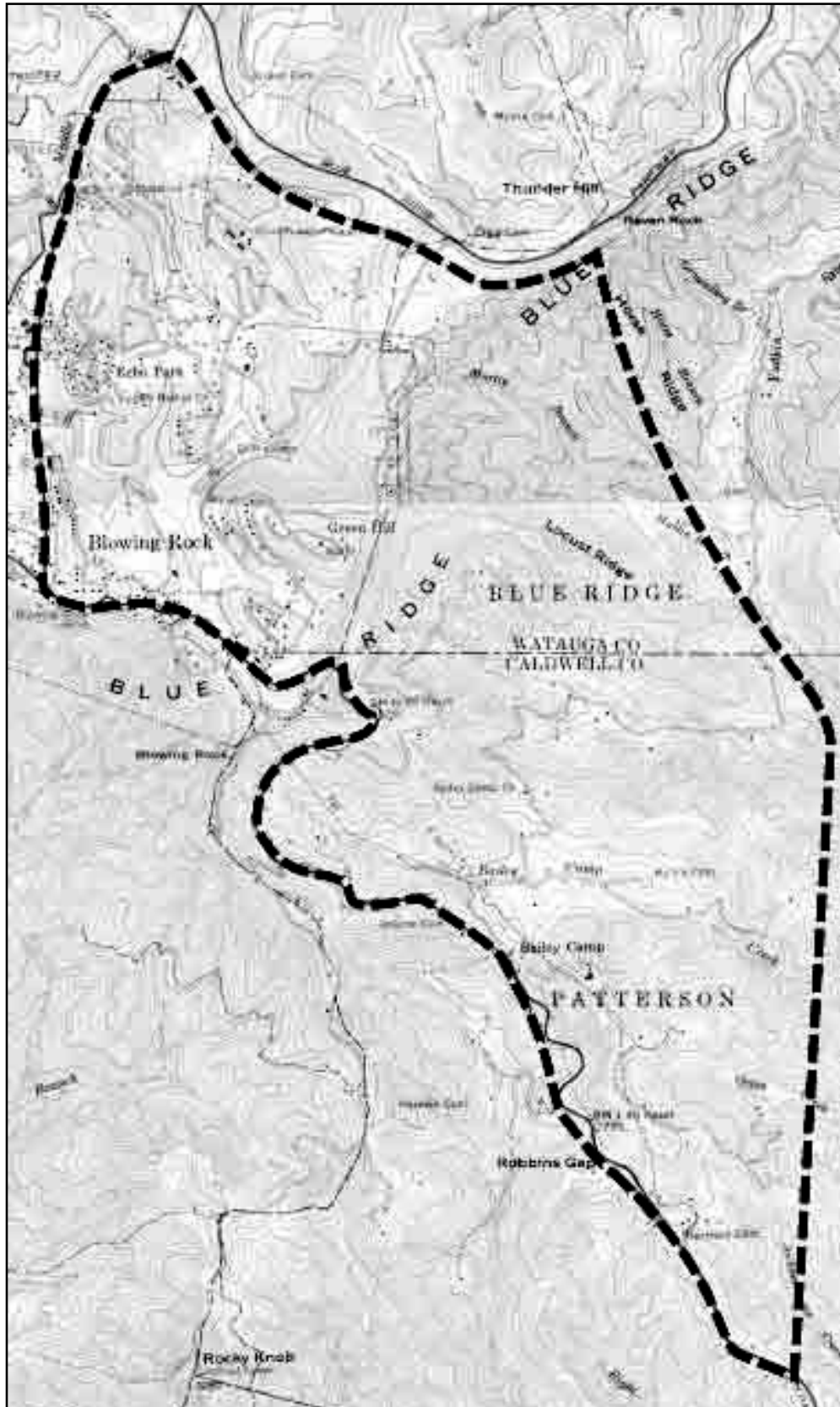
What will be accomplished during Phase I of the EIS study?

Phase I of the EIS study will examine a comprehensive range of Blowing Rock bypass alternatives. The study area for Phase I is shown below. Its northern limit is the Blue Ridge Parkway. Its southern limit is a point approximately one kilometer (0.6 mile) south of Falcon Crest Road. The southern limit could be moved further south if potential bypass alternatives necessitate this change.

The Phase I study will contain the following tasks:

- Identification of sensitive social, cultural and

Fiscal Year (FFY) 1995. Construction on that portion of the project is scheduled to begin in FFY 1997. Right-of-way acquisition and construction for the rest of the project (including the EIS study area) has not been scheduled.



- natural features in the Phase I study area.
- Preparation of traffic forecasts and an accident analysis.
- Update of the project's statement of purpose and need.
- Identification of potential bypass corridor alternatives based on public hearing and workshop comments, terrain and avoidance of sensitive features.
- Preparation of a functional design for each potential corridor. Alternative slope (cut-and-fill, retaining walls and bridges) and drainage treatments (ditches and curb and gutter) will be considered.
- Comparison of the potential corridors using construction and right-of-way cost, extent of excavation waste and other engineering factors, and the corridors' effect on sensitive features.
- Selection of reasonable bypass alternatives for detailed evaluation in the EIS.

What will be accomplished in Phases II and III?

Phase II will be the preparation of a Draft EIS. This document will compare in detail the merits of the widening alternative, the

reasonable bypass alternatives and the no-build alternative. Phase II also will include a preliminary design for the reasonable bypass alternatives and additional refinements to the widening alternative.

Phase III includes the preparation of a Final EIS, using comments received during the review of the Draft EIS. It will identify the preferred alternative.

When will the Phase I EIS study be completed?

The current schedule calls for Phase I to be completed in the Fall of 1996. Completion of Phase I will follow a second Citizens Informational Workshop in the summer of 1996. The comparison of preliminary bypass corridors will be presented for public comment at that time.

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC & ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The US 321 EIS Study will address the full range of relevant social, economic and environmental issues. In Phase I, bypass studies will focus on how well each bypass alternative avoids sensitive community, cultural and natural resources.

Issues important to the selection of reasonable bypass alternatives are expected to include:

- Social and Economic
 - Relocation of homes, businesses and other land uses

In Phase II, preparation of the Draft EIS, the potential impacts of both the widening alternative and the bypass alternatives will be assessed and compared. All of the Phase I issues and others will be addressed in greater detail. Based on past public and agency comment, it is expected that social, economic and cultural issues are of particular importance to the evaluation of the widening alternative, including:

- Potential loss of business during construction
- Potential for damage to structures in Blowing Rock caused by blasting
- Effects of a four-lane road on the desirability

- Sensitivity of existing and planned land uses to disturbance by traffic
- Use of farmlands
- Division of communities
- Changes in travel patterns
- Inequitable effects on social groups

- Cultural Resource

- Effects on views from the Blue Ridge Parkway
- Use of other public recreation lands
- Use of properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places or eligible for listing on the Register

- Natural Resource

- Use and division of biotic communities, particularly rare and unique areas
- Risk to water quality
- Use of wetlands
- Effects on protected species sites and habitat
- Use of floodplains

- Visual — Introduction of a bypass into scenic views

- Hazardous Waste and Underground Storage Tanks —Effects of known sites

of Blowing Rock to vacationers

- Change in the aesthetics of the roadway
- How the above impacts relate to the National Register of Historic Places-listed Green Park Inn and Green Park Historic District



Based on past agency comments, it is expected that several natural resource issues are particularly important to the evaluation of bypass alternatives. They include:

- Degradation of water quality on mountain streams
- Wildlife habitat fragmentation
- Disposal of leftover excavated material



Citizen Participation is Encouraged

The Public Involvement Program has been and will continue to be an important component of US 321 improvement studies. The Public Involvement Program provides interested persons the opportunity to participate in the planning process and to understand the overall study process and schedule.

A new component of the US 321 Public Involvement Program is a **Citizens Advisory Committee**. The committee has 12 members. Their names are listed on the next page. The members were named by the organizations they represent at the invitation of the NCDOT. The committee will meet five times during Phase I and continue to meet during Phases II and III. The NCDOT will present each component of the study to the committee for discussion. Members have been asked to discuss the materials presented at the committee meetings with the organizations they represent. Members also have been asked to help the NCDOT develop a project that offers a reasonable balance between the diverse issues associated with this project. Members will not be asked to make decisions for the NCDOT or commit the organizations they represent to a particular course of action.

Other involvement activities include:

- **Toll-free project information line** that provides direct contact between citizens and the study team.
- **Newsletters** describing the project's status and findings.
- **Citizens informational workshops** that provide an opportunity for the public to discuss the study and its findings with members of the study team.

Small group meetings. Community groups can arrange a meeting with the study team. Smaller groups should consider holding a joint meeting. The organization(s) sponsoring each meeting will be responsible for arranging a meeting site and notifying participants.

Call or Write the Study Team

If you have any questions, please call John Page on our toll-free project information line, 1-800-263-2434.

You may also write the study team at:

Mr. John Page, Project Manager
Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas,
Inc.

Citizens Advisory Committee Members

Carolyn G. Baucom

North Carolina
Alliance for
Transportation
Reform

Jan Greene

Caldwell
County
Commissioners

Lena Brooks

Jane P. Helm

991 Aviation Parkway, Suite 500
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or

Mr. H. Franklin Vick, PE Manager,
Planning and Environmental Branch
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PO Box 25201
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If you have not already done so, please
call the information line or write and ask
to be added to our **newsletter mailing
list.**



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Blowing Rock
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Kelly Coffey

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J. Owen Tolbert

Blowing Rock
Town Council
and Mayor

Linda Craig

Watauga
County
Commissioners

Edwin Vosburgh

Blowing Rock
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Society

Carolyn M. Ewing

Concerned
Citizens of
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Fred Wallace

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Local Sierra
Club Chapters

Howard Gray

Blowing Rock
Chamber of
Commerce

Bill Williamson

Blowing Rock
Merchants
Association